



REPORT

Report Date: March 22, 2023
Contact: Jason Olinek
Contact No.: 604.873.7492
RTS No.: 15692
VanRIMS No.: 08-2000-20
Meeting Date: May 9, 2023

TO: Vancouver City Council

FROM: General Manager, Planning, Urban Design and Sustainability

SUBJECT: 852 Seymour Street – Great War Veterans’ Association Hall – Heritage Designation By-law

RECOMMENDATION

- A. THAT Council add the property located at 852 Seymour Street (PID: 031-891-187; Lot A Block 64 District Lot 541 Group 1 New Westminster District Plan EPP12606 (the “site”)), known as the Great War Veterans’ Association Hall (the “heritage building”), to the *Vancouver Heritage Register* in the ‘B’ evaluation category.
- B. THAT Council instruct the Director of Legal Services to bring forward for enactment, pursuant to Sections 593 and 594 of the *Vancouver Charter*, a by-law to designate as protected heritage property the existing principal (west) facade of the heritage building.
- C. THAT Recommendation A and B be adopted on the following conditions:
 - (i) THAT the passage of the above resolution creates no legal rights for the applicant or any other person, or obligation on the part of the City and any expenditure of funds or incurring of costs in relation thereto is at the risk of the person making the expenditure or incurring the cost; and
 - (ii) THAT the City and all its officials shall not in any way be limited or restricted in the exercise of their authority or discretion, regardless of when they are called upon to exercise such authority or discretion.

REPORT SUMMARY

Council approval is being sought to add the heritage building, known as the Great War Veterans’ Association Hall (G.W.V.A. Hall), located at 852 Seymour Street, to the *Vancouver Heritage Register* (VHR) in the ‘B’ evaluation category and to designate the existing principal façade of the heritage building as protected heritage property.

The applicant has requested a 10% increase in permitted density as outlined in Development Permit Application DP-2022-00412 (the “DP Application”) and as further described in this report. The General Manager of Planning, Urban Design and Sustainability is prepared to approve the DP Application, subject to associated conditions, should Council approve the recommendations of this report.

COUNCIL AUTHORITY/PREVIOUS DECISIONS

Pursuant to sections 593 and 594 of the *Vancouver Charter*, Council, by by-law, may designate real property, in whole or in part, within the City of Vancouver as protected heritage property.

Pursuant to Section 595 of the *Vancouver Charter*, if sought, Council is required to compensate an owner of property being designated as a protected heritage property for any reduction in the market value of the property caused by the designation. The proposed heritage designation for the existing principal façade of the heritage building requires a public hearing and by-law enactment pursuant to Sections 593 and 594 of the *Vancouver Charter*.

The following Council policies are applicable to the project:

- *Vancouver Heritage Program* (March 2020)
- *Heritage Policies* (March 2020)
- *Downtown District Official Development Plan* (1975, last amended 2020)
- *Granville Street (Downtown South) Guidelines* (1991, last amended 2019)

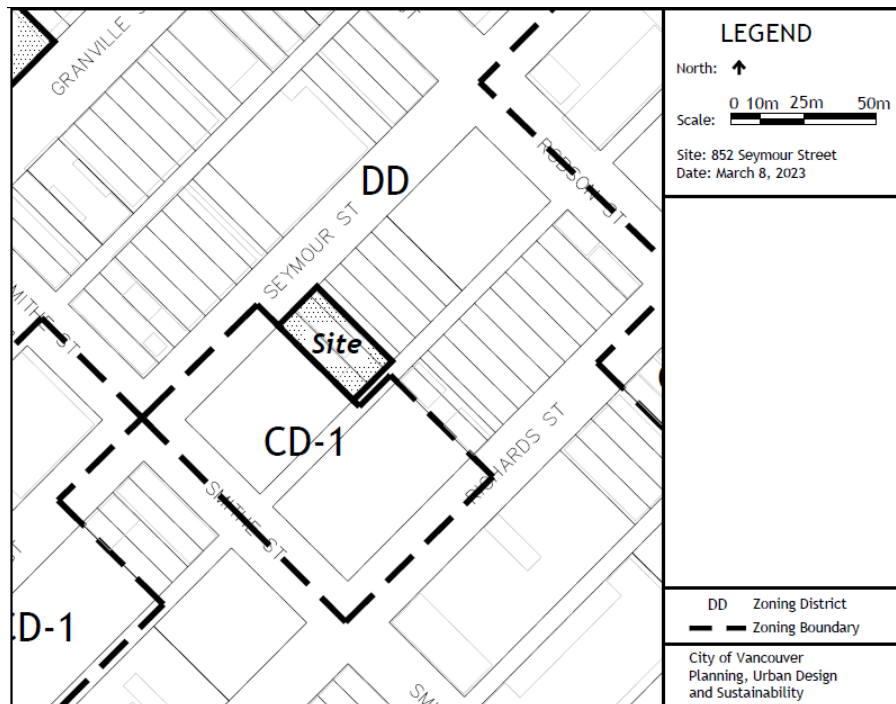
CITY MANAGER’S/GENERAL MANAGER’S COMMENTS

The City Manager recommends approval of the foregoing.

REPORT

Strategic Analysis

Site and Context - The site is located in the ‘Seymour-Smithe’, L1 sub area (see Figure 1) of the Downtown District Official Development Plan (the DDODP). A 6.1 m (20 foot) lane runs along the rear of the site. In addition to the heritage building, a one storey commercial building constructed in the 1920s, which is not listed on the VHR, also exists on the site and is proposed to be demolished (See Appendix A).

Figure 1: The site and surrounding zoning

Heritage Value - The heritage building was built in 1926 and is valued for its association with the recognition of veterans and their service to the country. Following the First World War, a variety of organizations were formed across Canada to assist members of the Canadian military with beginning their post-war lives. As part of this, the Great War Veterans’ Association was created in 1917. By 1925 there were more than 700 branches, and the organization grew to become the largest veteran organization in Canada. The heritage building served Vancouver veterans for more than three decades before transitioning to commercial use.

The heritage building is also significant for its later use, from 1976 to 1992, as the Playpen Central Nightclub. The club, on the second floor, was at the heart of the LGBTQ2S+ nightlife community of the time, which encompassed six other bars within a two-block area. The club was established by Vance Campbell and Blaine Culling, who would go on to found Granville Entertainment which opened a number of similar clubs. The heritage building exists as an important representation of Vancouver’s LGBTQ2S+ community and the growth of the community’s nightlife spaces beginning in the 1970s.

The heritage building is also an excellent example of Classical interwar architecture as designed by prominent architect Alfred Arthur Cox, whose work includes the Vancouver General Hospital campus. Classical design features of the heritage building include its symmetrical concrete front façade, central two-storey pilasters with a pediment, paired recessed entrances with projecting cornices, and original wooden-sash windows.

Development Permit Application and Proposed Incentives – The DP Application proposes to add the existing building to the VHR in the ‘B’ evaluation category and to retain and rehabilitate its principal façade, which is to be protected by the proposed Designation By-law. In

early reviews staff and the applicant concluded that it is not possible to retain the whole heritage building and allow for development as permitted under the DDODP zoning, but in this case retention of the existing principal façade could be considered (see the Heritage Policy discussion in Appendix D). As a condition of the DP Application approval, a Restoration Covenant has been completed and will be registered on title to the site, prior to the issuance of a development permit, to ensure conservation and the ongoing long-term maintenance of the principal façade. On the interior, the basic volume of the original structure is reflected in the design of the internal space to give a sense of the scale of the building. The principal façade is to be rehabilitated in-situ (see Viability of Proposed Conservation).

The Development Permit Board (the “DP Board”), granted a conditional increase in density of 10% over the maximum permitted density in return for the conservation of heritage property, which is permitted in the DDODP. The DP Application’s approval is subject to conditions that Council adds the site to the VHR and designates the principal facade of the heritage building as protected heritage property. A technical summary is provided in Appendix C.

Viability of Proposed Conservation - The heritage building is in good condition overall, with some repairs needed on the exterior. The applicant’s heritage consultant has provided a detailed conservation plan and staff have concluded that the work is generally consistent with *Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada*. The proposal was reviewed by the Vancouver Heritage Commission (VHC) who supported the proposed conservation measures (see Public/Civic Agency Input).

Compatibility of Conservation with Community Planning Objectives and Lawful Uses - The *Granville Street (Downtown South) Guidelines* state:

“...When developing a site with a heritage building, options for its retention should be explored...New development adjacent to historic buildings should respect their scale, massing, facade proportions and design.”

The retention of the heritage building’s principal façade and the integration of it into a modern building form have, in staff’s opinion, been successful as proposed and are consistent with the community planning objectives for the area.

Public/Civic Agency Input

On July 11, 2022, the Vancouver Heritage Commission reviewed and unanimously supported the project including the addition of the site to the VHR and the heritage conservation and designation of the heritage building’s principal façade (see Appendix E).

Financial

Development Cost Levies (DCLs) - This site is subject to Citywide DCLs and Citywide Utilities DCLs on the proposed new floor area of 3,831.0 m² (41,240 sq. ft.). Based on rates in effect as of September 30, 2023, total DCLs of approximately \$1,017,476 are anticipated from this development (see Appendix F for more detail).

Heritage - The owner has offered to retain, conserve and rehabilitate the heritage building’s principal façade and to accept the designation of the principal façade’s structure and exterior as protected heritage property, which is a highly valued community feature and public benefit. The

premium cost to the applicant of the proposed on-site heritage conservation is estimated to be approximately \$1,000,000.

Legal

The owner’s obligations to restore and retain the heritage building’s principal façade will be secured as legal obligations in a agreement (Restoration Covenant) to be registered on title to the site. City staff and the owner have negotiated an agreement, which includes retention and conservation obligations on the part of the owner and enforcement provisions for the City.

Section 595 of the *Vancouver Charter* requires that, if sought, Council must compensate an owner for any reduction in the market value of property caused by a heritage designation. The owner has signed an agreement to be registered on title to the site explicitly accepting the relaxations and increases to be provided, and the resulting development advantages to be gained thereby, as full and final compensation for the heritage designation of the heritage building’s principal facade and the obligations to rehabilitate and conserve it. The agreement will be executed by the City and registered on title to the site before a development permit for the project may be issued.

CONCLUSION

The heritage building, known as the Great War Veterans’ Association Hall, located at 852 Seymour Street, is proposed to be added to the *Vancouver Heritage Register* in the ‘B’ evaluation category for its social and aesthetic values, and to have its principal facade protected by a Heritage Designation By-law. This will secure the heritage building’s principal facade from demolition and unsympathetic exterior alterations which might affect its heritage value. The owner has agreed to accept an increase of 10% in permitted density as compensation for the proposed designation, and for the obligations for continued conservation of the principal facade. Staff support the DP Application, subject to heritage designation and other conditions of the DP Application. Therefore, staff recommend that Council approve the recommendations of this report.

* * * * *

852 Seymour Street
PHOTOGRAPHS AND MAPS



G.W.V.A. Hall (left) – current photo (looking east)



Details of Windows



Classical Entrance Details



Aerial View of the Site – 1950s

852 Seymour Street
STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Address: 852 Seymour Street, Vancouver, British Columbia

Name: Great War Veterans' Association Hall

Original Owner: Great War Veterans' Association

Architect: Alfred Arthur (A.A.) Cox

Contractor: Cameron Construction Co.

Date of Construction: 1926

Description of Historic Place

Located on the east side of the 800-block of Seymour Street in downtown Vancouver, the Great War Veterans' Association (G.W.V.A.) Hall was constructed in 1926. The two-storey building is characterized by its Classical symmetrical front façade with large multi-paned windows and central peaked pediment.

Heritage Value of Historic Place

The G.W.V.A. Hall is significant for its association with Canada's largest veteran organization. The building is additionally valued as an excellent example of refined Classical interwar architecture, as designed by architect A.A. Cox, and for its later use as the Playpen Central, an important part of Vancouver's LGBTQ2S+ nightlife scene.

The G.W.V.A. Hall is valued for its association with Vancouver's First World War veterans and the national movement to unite and advocate for the former members of the Canadian military. Following the War, a variety of organizations were formed across Canada to assist members of the Canadian military with beginning their post-war lives. The G.W.V.A. was formed in 1917 and by 1925 there were more than 700 branches across the country, including Vancouver; it grew to become the largest veteran organization in Canada. In 1925, veteran groups across the country, including the G.W.V.A., amalgamated, which led to the creation of the Canadian Legion in 1926, the same year this building was constructed. The Hall originally bore the name 'G.W.V.A. Branch No. 19 of the Canadian Legion' and served Vancouver veterans for more than three decades before transitioning to commercial use.

The G.W.V.A. Hall is an excellent example of Classical interwar architecture as designed by prominent architect Alfred Arthur Cox. Classically trained in England, Cox moved to Canada and maintained a successful and prolific practice for sixteen years in Montréal, where he specialized in commercial buildings. In 1908, Cox moved west, establishing his practice in Vancouver. Cox obtained numerous commissions from prominent businessmen, corporations, and the provincial government, for commercial and institutional buildings, and designed several buildings for the Vancouver General Hospital between 1912 and 1915. His career was paused by the First World War, however, he, like many of his contemporaries, recovered during the interwar development boom. During this period, Cox designed a variety of buildings, including the Bank of Nova Scotia in Victoria (1923), the Vancouver Women's Building (1926), and this Hall in 1926. The G.W.V.A. Hall exists as an example of Cox's progressive work, which bridged the Classical prewar architectural trends with the advance toward Modernism. Cox's understanding of Classicism is evident in the subtle and refined design of the building, which was pared down to essential elements in a manner that pointed in the direction of emerging modernistic trends. By 1934, Cox had returned to England and the G.W.V.A. Hall remains a late and masterful example of his work in Vancouver.

The G.W.V.A. Hall is significant for its later use, from 1976 to 1992, as the Playpen Central nightclub. The club was at the heart of the LGBTQ2S+ nightlife community of the time, which encompassed six other bars within the two block area. Located on the second floor of the building, the club was created by Vance Campbell, who, along with partner Blaine Culling, would go on to found Granville Entertainment, which opened the Roxy, managed the Vogue Theatre, and opened two clubs at the former Comfort Inn on Granville Street. Following its use as Playpen Central, the space became a Karaoke bar and was subsequently reincarnated as a venue for LGBTQ2S+ nightlife events. The G.W.V.A. Hall exists as an important representation of Vancouver's LGBTQ2S+ community and the growth of the community's nightlife spaces beginning in the 1970s.

Character-Defining Elements

Elements that define the heritage character of the Great War Veterans' Association Hall are its:

- mid-block location along Seymour Street in downtown Vancouver;
- institutional form, scale, and massing as expressed by its two-storey height with flat roof, main floor set one half-storey above grade, banked windows, and twin recessed entryways on each side of the front façade;
- reinforced concrete construction, with parged front façade, and terrazzo steps and landings;
- Classical design features, including: a rigidly symmetrical front façade; central two-storey engaged pilasters with engaged pediment above; paired recessed entrances with projecting bracketted cornices, front façade parging with scored block lines, extending as quoined returns on side elevations; second floor projecting bracketted sills; and abstracted parapet shields;
- original wooden-sash windows, including 2-by-4 casements in double assembly and 3-by-4 casements in triple assembly.

852 Seymour Street
TECHNICAL ZONING AND PARKING SUMMARY

Table 1: Zoning Summary; DD Zoning

Site Area: 696 m2 (7,494 sq. ft.)

Item	Existing	Permitted or Required	Proposed
Uses	Commercial	Commercial	Commercial
Floor Space Ratio (FSR)	1.3 FSR	5.5 FSR maximum with 10% heritage bonus	5.5 FSR
Floor Area	931 m2 (10,000 sq. ft.) Approximately	3,831 m2 (41,240 sq. ft.)	3,831 m2 (41,240 sq. ft.)
Overall Height	Two Storeys	21.3 m (70.1 feet) Maximum	21.3 m (70.1 feet)

Table 2: Parking By-law Summary

Item	Existing	Permitted or Required	Proposed
Off Street Parking	NA	33 Total Minimum	41 Total

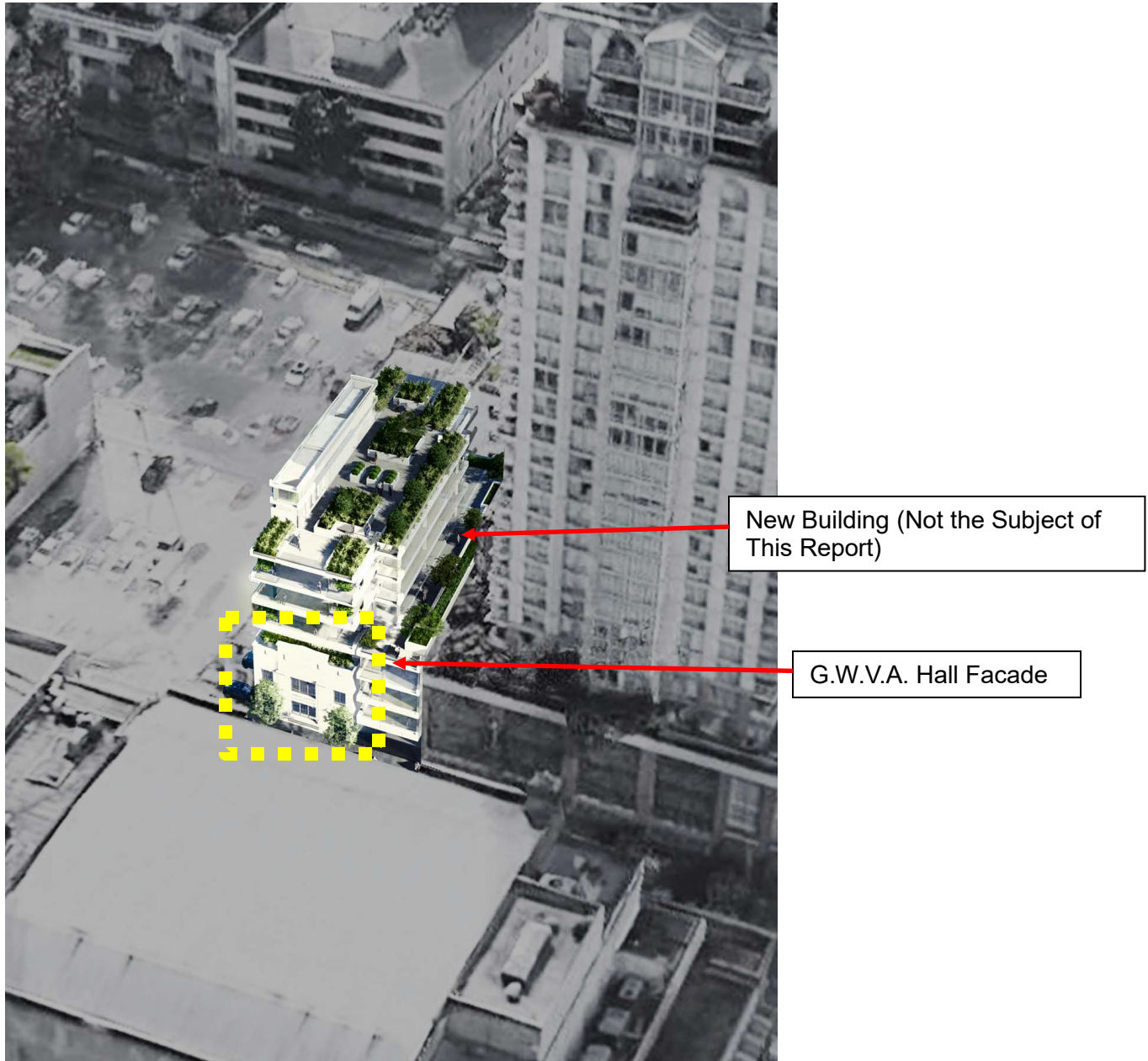
852 Seymour Street
DRAWINGS



Site Diagram



Seymour Street Elevation / Rendering



New Building (Not the Subject of This Report)

G.W.V.A. Hall Facade

Context Rendering Looking Northeast

Heritage Policy

The City's Heritage Policy state that:

“A development proposal that includes a heritage property should be generally consistent with the Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada, applicable Zoning District Schedule and Design Guidelines....Façade-only retention is generally not considered to be an appropriate heritage conservation procedure. A proposal based on this approach may not be supportable and will not typically be eligible for heritage incentives.”

In early reviews it was concluded that the density permitted under the DDODP would make full retention of the heritage building very challenging. In considering the proposal under the DP Application to retain only the front façade, it was noted that because of the façade's robust concrete construction and details, retaining the façade might be viable and would retain most of the building's aesthetic features. This conclusion was based on the presumption that the new building was appropriately integrated with the façade in a manner consistent with the *Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada* (“Standard and Guidelines”).

Staff note that the application does not involve a rezoning application or a site currently on the VHR. The design of the new building is differentiated in style and detail from the G.W.V.A. Hall's façade and separated above via setbacks and structural openings (see drawings in Appendix D, noting that the new building is not the subject of this report). On the south side of the façade the new building is setback to reinforce the sense of separation of the new and the old structures. On the north side, the new wall behind the façade is to replicate the proportions of the original side of the building.

852 Seymour Street
RESOLUTIONS OF THE VANCOUVER HERITAGE COMMISSION

On July 11, 2022, The Vancouver Heritage Commission reviewed the DP Application and resolved the following:

WHEREAS the Great War Veterans' Association (G.W.V.A.) Hall at 852 Seymour Street was designed by architect A.A. Cox and constructed in 1926; and the VHC Register Evaluation for the site concluded the building is a candidate for addition to the Vancouver Heritage Register in the 'B' category; and the G.W.V.A. Hall exists as an important representation of Vancouver's LGBTQ2S+ community and the growth of the Community's nightlife spaces beginning in the 1970s;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Vancouver Heritage Commission supports

1. The addition of the site to the Vancouver Heritage Register in the 'B' category as part of the application;
2. The proposed Designation By-law;
3. The new building design as presented in the DP Application (dated April 22, 2022), regarding the retention strategy and distinguishability from the heritage building; and
4. The Conservation Plan, dated April 2022.

Furthermore, it requests (or recommends) further design development on the following matters:

- Request future development to the North be set back so that it reveals part of the corner of the heritage façade; and
- Consider up to 10-foot flexibility in the height of the building noticing the special condition relating to matching new construction to the existing heritage façade.

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

Staff Comments: Future development to the north will be assessed at the time it is brought forward and a response to context is likely to be a key consideration in the design of any development adjoining the site to the north. At this stage additional height other than standard appurtenances is not being considered due to associated built form guidelines for the area.

852 Seymour Street
PUBLIC BENEFITS SUMMARY

Project Summary:

Rehabilitation and conservation of the principal façade of a heritage building and construction of a new seven storey commercial building under the Downtown District (DD) Official Development Plan (ODP) zoning.

Public Benefit Summary:

The project would result in the conservation and long-term protection of a heritage resource.

	Current Zoning	Proposed
Zoning District	DD	DD
FSR (site area = 696 m ² (7,494 sq.ft.))	5.5	5.5
Buildable Floor Area	3,831 m ² (41,240 sq. ft.)	3,831 m ² (41,240 sq. ft.)
Land Use	Commercial	Commercial

**with 10% bonus density for heritage conservation. Base zoning maximum is 5.0 FSR.*

Summary of development contributions expected from proposed development

DCL (City-wide) ¹	\$766,890
DCL (Utilities) ¹	\$250,586
TOTAL	\$1,017,476

Other benefits:

Proposed on-site heritage conservation premium cost estimated to be approximately \$1,000,000

¹ Based on by-laws in effect as of September 30, 2022 and assumes the development maximizes the allowable density. While DCLs would not apply to retained floor area of a heritage project, in this project only the façade is being expected to be retained. DCLs are payable at building permit issuance based on rates in effect at that time and the floor area proposed at the development permit stage. DCL by-laws are subject to future adjustment by Council including annual inflationary adjustments. A development may qualify for 12 months of in-stream rate protection. See the City's [DCL Bulletin](#) for more details.